

# NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

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## Changing opportunities: refugees and host communities in western Tanzania

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#### NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH

*Kila kibaya kina uzuri wake.*  
Every bad thing has its good side.  
Swahili saying

### Introduction

The plight of refugees from Rwanda, Burundi, and Democratic Republic of Congo made international headlines between 1993 and 1998. Throughout central Africa, roughly 3.4 million refugees crossed international borders, 2.3 million persons became internally displaced, and 600,000 exiles returned to their countries of origin. In this context, nearly 1.3 million people

sought refuge in western Tanzania. Kagera and Kigoma regions have a total Tanzanian population of nearly 2.5 million. The refugee influx therefore represented an overall population increase in these regions of more than 50 percent, while in some areas refugees outnumbered locals five to one.<sup>1</sup> Although some refugees left after a few months, others stayed for several years. In December 1998, some 344,000 remained.

The drama of such numbers attracted considerable international attention. In response, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) established massive relief programs to address the needs of refugees and, in some cases, local hosts. But less attention was given to the effects of this situation on the ecology, economy, and politics of those already living in western Tanzania. Together, the sudden presence of refugees, aid workers, and relief resources significantly altered all aspects of life for people in this previously-neglected corner of the country. This project, based on twenty-two months of participatory field research from October 1996 to August 1998, examines the implications of the presence of refugees and the relief operation for host communities in western Tanzania. Funding for the research was provided by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Abroad Fellowship, a P.E.O. Scholar Award, and a Doctoral Dissertation Research Fellowship from the Institute for the Study of World Politics. The support of these institutions is gratefully acknowledged.

### **Refugees and host populations**

There has been little academic research about the impact of refugees on host populations, although the issue has caused growing concern on the part of the international community and host governments (Callamard 1994). Since the 1980s, refugee aid and development (RAD) theories called for strategies linking refugee relief programs with local development policies (Betts 1981, 1984; Gorman 1993). The second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II) in 1984 asserted that refugee assistance should be development-oriented and should take into account host population needs. Nevertheless, a number of factors impeded effective integration of refugee aid and development policies, including lack of support in donor and host countries, weak coordination between refugee and development bureaucracies, and difficulties integrating increasing numbers of refugees into development plans (Gorman 1994)

While RAD theories managed to draw attention to the situation of host populations, they were based on the fundamental assumption that refugees represent a problem or a burden, rather than an opportunity (Harrell-Bond 1986). Recently, it has been recognized that refugee migrations bring both costs and benefits to host countries (Kuhlman 1994; Sorenson 1994; Baker 1995). Refugees generally impose a burden on local infrastructure, environment, and resources. Refugees can also benefit hosts, though, by providing cheap labor to local producers, expanding consumer markets for local goods, and justifying increased foreign aid. Thus, the reception of refugees can sometimes be seen as part of a government's broader development plan (Daley 1993)

In the end, though, these conceptualizations about the host country impact of refugee populations are too broad. Rather than asking whether or not the host country as a whole benefits, one should disaggregate the question: who benefits and who loses from refugee influxes and why? Refugees are assumed to have a different impact on diverse classes, genders, sectors, and regions within the host country (Chambers 1986; Kuhlman 1990; Sorenson 1994), but little empirical research has been done on this issue. In addition, the situation is expected to be dynamic over time; what starts out as a liability may turn into a resource, and vice versa. This research seeks to contribute to this line of inquiry by examining not only the costs and benefits associated with the refugee presence, but also their variations among host populations over the past several years

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<sup>1</sup> One village in Ngara district with a local population of 10,000 people hosted more than 400,000 refugees within its boundaries.

This paper is part of a larger project which explores the socioeconomic and political implications of the refugee presence for host communities in western Tanzania. The project examines the rational ways in which local populations responded to unforeseen changes in their lives. The research highlights the ways in which this local political context fits into an increasingly interconnected global environment. The current paper focuses on changing opportunities faced by host communities. The influx of refugees created a new context in which hosts devised strategies to gain access to incoming resources and to maintain access to their own resources. Differing strategies and structures allowed some hosts to benefit, while others became worse off. In the end, Tanzanian hosts developed ways to cope with negative aspects of the refugee presence while taking advantage of positive opportunities.

### **Changing opportunities in the local context**

The sudden presence of refugees and relief resources in western Tanzania significantly altered the lives of people who lived there. The opportunities available to host communities changed in both positive and negative ways. Although hosts experienced the changes differently, those variations are discussed in subsequent sections of the paper. This section focuses on the broad patterns which emerged during the course of the research. Changing opportunities were experienced in five areas in the local context: agriculture, environment, market economy, infrastructure and development resources, and way of life.

#### ***Agricultural opportunities***

Agriculture is the primary occupation for more than ninety percent of the residents of western Tanzania, and also for the large majority of refugees who arrived in recent years. The sudden population increase most immediately affected food security in local villages, particularly at the beginning of the refugee influx. At first, villagers sympathized with the plight of the newly-arrived refugees and contributed their own food. Hungry and tired refugees also helped themselves to local farmers' crops, especially along the main entry paths. One elderly man from the border area explained his experience:

I myself had one acre of sugar cane, but that year [1993] the whole farm was cut down because of all the people coming in along that route from Burundi. I had six acres of cassava, but it was all cut down by people who camped out there until they came up here to the camps. But there is nothing one can do about it. After all, war does not have eyes.

Even after refugees started receiving rations through the international relief operation, though, they continued to depend on local crops and livestock. Refugee rations consisted primarily of beans, maize, cooking oil, and salt. In order to diversify their diets, refugees sought other types of food, including meats, vegetables, and grains. They generally preferred their own staples of cassava, cooking bananas, and sweet potatoes, which were also produced by local farmers. Refugees therefore used a variety of strategies to gain access to these foods, including trading, purchasing, and stealing. With this huge increase in the market for local crops, the prices of foods such as cassava and especially cooking bananas skyrocketed. In response to these market forces, many Tanzanian farmers sold dangerously high portions of their own food stocks, thereby further threatening the food security of their own households (FAO 1995; NRI 1996).

Although beans and maize are also produced in western Tanzania, the World Food Programme (WFP) did not purchase these products from local farmers to distribute to refugees. A local-purchase system would have allowed farmers to benefit explicitly from the refugee presence, but it would also have pushed up prices, encouraged farmers to sell even more of their crops, and thus in a sense created famine within local communities. In order to avoid artificial scarcity of commodities, therefore, WFP bought its supplies from other regions of Tanzania and neighboring countries. This likely prevented the food security situation in western Tanzania from becoming worse. Nevertheless, in some areas, prices for these items plummeted as refugees sold their rations, and local farmers were unable to sell their own surplus beans and maize for any profit at all.

On the positive side, refugees represented a source of cheap agricultural labor for villagers in western Tanzania. This was particularly true during the Rwandan refugee presence when refugees outnumbered local hosts in some places. Despite a government rule forbidding refugees to travel beyond four kilometers from their camps, refugee laborers worked throughout the area. Later, the government tightened its control over refugee movement, and refugees generally worked only in villages closer to the camps. It was difficult at times to discuss refugee employment with Tanzanians because they knew that it was forbidden to harbor refugees in local villages.

Tanzanians hired refugees to do agricultural work such as weeding, harvesting, and clearing land, but also to build houses, tend livestock, and fetch water or firewood. Refugee labor was attractive to local farmers because it was cheap and readily available. Nearly 75 percent of the time, refugees were paid with food instead of money (SCF 1998). In addition, many farmers believed that refugees were more reliable and diligent than Tanzanian laborers, who were forced after the refugee influx to seek work in areas further away from the camps. It is difficult to know exactly what percentage of hosts in western Tanzania took advantage of the opportunity to hire refugee labor, although it ranged from quite high (more than 75 percent) in Karagwe district to relatively low (less than 25 percent) in Kigoma region where there were more restrictions on refugee movement.

Casual labor wages varied depending on distance from the camps and the type of work. In camp areas where there was a large supply of labor, refugees worked for about six hours and received Tsh 100-400 (17-67¢) per day.<sup>2</sup> Further away, refugees earned as much as Tsh 500 (83¢) per day and often stayed for several weeks before returning to the camp to receive rations and visit their families. Generally, refugee women were not able to seek employment in remote areas because of family responsibilities in the camps, and therefore accepted lower wages in nearby villages. Wages were higher during agricultural seasons when labor was in demand. Many Tanzanians recognized the humanitarian needs of the refugees, though, and hired them even at low seasons when their labor was not required (Maruku ARI 1997). In this sense, therefore, the relationship between hosts and refugee laborers was perhaps not as exploitative as otherwise perceived (Harrell-Bond 1986).<sup>3</sup>

By using refugee labor, hosts increased both cultivation and production. In Karagwe district, for example, farmers on average doubled the size of their cultivated lands. In addition to household plots, they expanded their periphery intercropping plots and even plots previously kept as grasslands. According to the district agriculture department, production of bananas went from 396 metric tons in 1993 to 651 metric tons in 1996; bean production rose from 19 metric tons to 38 metric tons in the same period. Some local farmers even increased their cultivated areas by loaning land to refugees through winamo, a system whereby the landlord is paid a percentage of the eventual harvest.

Despite the benefits of refugee labor, many villagers blamed theft, particularly of food crops, on such workers. They claimed that refugees worked on local farms during the day and scouted out which crops were ready to harvest, only to return later at night and take whatever was ripe. In some areas, the problem was so pervasive that villagers perceived refugee labor as a cost rather than a benefit. "But yet," remarked one district official, "local Tanzanians continue to keep refugees in their houses and keep on hiring them."

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<sup>2</sup> All costs are calculated at US \$1,600 Tanzanian shillings (Tsh), roughly the average exchange rate over the research period. These wages were about 20-50 percent lower than those of Tanzanian farm laborers, who received Tsh 300-500 per day. In comparison, local primary school teachers earned an average of Tsh 40,000 per month (about Tsh 1,700 per working day). The government minimum wage was raised in this period from Tsh 17,000 to Tsh 30,000 per month (approximately Tsh 740 to Tsh 1,300 per working day).

<sup>3</sup> In arguing against the myth of traditional African hospitality toward refugees, Kibreab (1985) claims that "refugees are ruthlessly exploited by the ...local population" (p74). Findings from this research and other studies (Harrell-Bond 1986) question his assertion.

Although food shortages were balanced in part by expansion of farms and purchase of rations from refugees, supply still did not meet demand in some host communities. A 1996 survey of children in Ngara district found malnutrition rates of 8.8 percent and 6.5 percent in two Tanzanian villages, compared to just 1.6 percent in one refugee camp (Joyce-Jenkins et al 1996). However, malnutrition, like hunger, is seasonal, and was a problem throughout the region even before the refugees. In certain areas, people confuse the concept of 'food shortage' with a shortage of bananas, which are the preferred staple food (Ndege et al 1995). Thus, in this case,<sup>4</sup> the decline in food security should not be equated with widespread famine. In addition, food shortages in 1997 and 1998 were due largely to weather patterns (drought followed by flooding) rather than the refugee presence.

Surveys in western Tanzania found that labor shortages and lack of markets were significant constraints to agricultural production (Ndege et al 1995; Maruku ARI 1997). Before the refugees, for example, Karagwe district often produced a surplus, but bananas and beans went rotten because there was no market. The massive influx of refugees from neighboring countries increased the size of the local market, as well as the pool of labor. Tanzanian hosts responded quickly to the increased demand for local produce by using refugee labor to expand their farms and increase production. Farmers would not have increased cultivation and production had there not been a market for the crops.

This evidence supports arguments from the literature on production in rural Africa. It is clear that farmers are sensitive to market opportunities and respond to price incentives by altering production patterns (Bates 1981; Kasfir 1986; Barker 1989; Callamard 1994). The findings also suggest that the shortage of labor is one of the main constraints to agricultural growth in Africa, in large part because labor requirements are seasonal (Berry 1993). Finally, patterns in western Tanzania demonstrate that farmers seek to diversify their sources of income by producing for the informal economy, altering crop production, and changing cultivation methods—all in an effort to increase overall food security (Berry 1993; Callamard 1994). Thus, the dynamics of agriculture within the refugee context provide additional insights toward further understanding peasant production strategies.

### ***Competition for scarce resources***

The refugee presence in western Tanzania negatively affected local access to environmental resources such as firewood and water. Many refugee camps were located relatively close to protected forest reserves, where refugee cutting and charcoal-burning practices threatened vital natural resources. Although environmental degradation was a problem even before the refugees (FAO 1995), the rate of deforestation accelerated greatly during their presence.<sup>5</sup> In an area where trees are the primary source of fuel, deforestation posed a problem to both locals and refugees. Refugees also failed to respect the cultural importance of certain local trees which were used to mark gravesites and boundaries, for medicinal purposes, or as aphrodisiacs (Kiiza-Wandira 1998). This further fueled the struggle between refugees and villagers for control over natural resources.

As a general category, refugees are predisposed to become resource degraders (Jacobsen 1998). They are disempowered in the local host context and their traditional leaders—who previously monitored resource management—are replaced by new leaders who are more concerned with NGO-refugee relations (Kibreab 1996). As a result, they tend to adopt unsustainable resource use practices. In addition, refugees often use more firewood than their local hosts; they rarely put out fires between meals for lack of matches, and dried food rations take longer to cook than fresh crops. Surveys in western Tanzania found that refugees used an average 2.8 kilograms of wood per person per day, whereas local hosts used just 1.7 kilograms

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<sup>4</sup> As opposed to western Sudan, where de Waal (1988) found that the presence of 120,000 Chadian refugees combined with inappropriate assistance programs to create and prolong severe famine in 1984-85.

<sup>5</sup> At their peak, refugees in Kagera region used firewood at a rate of approximately 300 metric tons per day (FAO 1995), and only 20 percent of refugee needs were supplied by the relief agencies (Nderumaki 1995).

per person per day.<sup>6</sup> Poor refugee cultivation techniques reflected lack of ownership and a perceived liberty to farm without regulations.<sup>7</sup>

But environmental degradation in refugee-hosting areas is not inevitable (McGregor 1993; Jacobsen 1997). The degree to which refugees negatively affect host environments depends on a variety of factors, including settlement patterns and refugee-host relations. In the specific case of western Tanzania, the establishment of several large and concentrated refugee camps increased the severity of environmental damage. In addition, the relative remoteness of some camps prevented refugees and hosts from working collectively to develop sustainable resource management strategies.

Deforestation in refugee-hosting areas of Kagera and Kigoma regions had social as well as environmental implications. Those responsible for collecting firewood, generally women and children, spent more time and energy going further away in their search for wood. This reduced time available for other productive activities. Many women either farmed or got firewood on any given day, rather than doing both. Firewood also became a business, with both refugees and locals selling it by the bundle. Of course, the purchase of firewood was only an option for villagers who could afford to pay.

There was also increased competition for scarce water resources during the refugee presence. Water sources, including aquifers beneath the camps, were depleted, and several rivers were diverted to the refugee camps from host villages. Land usage rights were contested. Fields that had previously been used by villagers were farmed by refugees. Often, the land was not being actively farmed when the refugees arrived, but villagers had a rotation system in which the land was cultivated again after several years. Areas earlier used to graze livestock were depleted or farmed, forcing herders to take their flocks longer distances. The refugee presence also affected game reserves. Both refugee and Tanzanian profit-seekers exploited the large refugee market by selling game meat in the camps.<sup>8</sup> In some reserves, nearly 30 percent of the pre-refugee game population was poached. Nevertheless, in some areas, poaching eliminated destructive animals which previously destroyed agricultural crops. In general, environmental degradation was worst in areas closest to the camps, but its ripple effects were felt throughout western Tanzania.

Interestingly, the negative environmental consequences of the refugee presence may have had positive implications for host attitudes toward natural resources. Deforestation was a problem in the area even before the influx of refugees. Few Tanzanians recognized the need to plant trees, and local nurseries faced difficulties selling seedlings. When the refugees came, though, the interest of Tanzanians in buying seedlings increased dramatically because trees suddenly had financial value. Some local entrepreneurs started large tree farms with the expectation that refugees would again be around in twenty years. Thus, the changing opportunities associated with the refugee presence in fact increased the value attached by hosts to certain natural resources.

### ***Economic opportunities***

The influx of refugees and relief resources into western Tanzania significantly altered economic opportunities for host communities. With the increased local market, there was an upsurge in business and trade conducted by both local hosts and refugees. Tanzanian entrepreneurs from around the country also flocked to the area. Commercial centers developed in the refugee camps with daily markets and countless shops and restaurants. The largest of these centers was at Njia Panda in Ngara district, which was transformed from an intersection with one petrol station and a hotel into a thriving trading hub. In many cases, refugees were perceived as better at doing business than their local hosts. While most Tanzanians attributed refugee

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<sup>6</sup> Combined results of several household surveys conducted by CARE International in Tanzania.

<sup>7</sup> "Status Report: Cultivation." CARE Ngara/Biharamulo: Kagera Environment Programme.

<sup>8</sup> Game meat was available daily in refugee markets at just Tsh 300-500 per kilogram-roughly half the price of beef or goat.

success to better entrepreneurial skills, it may have been driven by the relative marginalization of refugees from agriculture (Wilson 1985).

Towns in western Tanzania also thrived. Previously, these district headquarters had been sleepy outposts where it was almost impossible to find vegetables in the market, and meat was only available on Saturdays. In most cases, the district commissioner's car was one of just a handful in town. After the refugee influx, hundreds of vehicles cruised local roads. There were daily markets with plentiful supplies of consumer items. Several enterprising Tanzanians even opened shops which catered to expatriate aid workers' tastes for chocolate, cheese, European wines, and satellite television. The boom was not restricted to refugee-hosting districts, either; entrepreneurs and aid agencies conducted considerable business at supply centers in Bukoba, Mwanza, Kigoma, and even Dar es Salaam.<sup>9</sup>

Trade also increased significantly at the village level. Before the refugee influx, farmers had difficulty finding local markets for their harvests (Ndege et al 1995), and often traded across the border in Rwanda or Burundi. With the outbreak of war in both countries and the subsequent influx of refugees, the border trade broke down. Markets shifted to the new population centers - refugee camps - which were generally located twenty to forty kilometers away from the border. Border trading towns which were once home to thriving 'international' businesses were negatively affected by this abrupt collapse of local markets (Harrell-Bond 1986). In other areas, though, the coming of the refugees effectively moved markets closer to local villagers. Suddenly, instead of walking or seeking transport to the border, hosts sold their products in nearby camps. Often, refugees bought crops from local farmers at their homes. In a sense, therefore, the dislocation of merchandising allowed average Tanzanian villagers to become traders and businesspeople.

Tanzanian farmers sold and traded a wide range of products to the refugee and expatriate markets, including sweet potatoes, cassava, pineapples, palm oil, vegetables, bananas, and local brew.<sup>10</sup> In exchange, refugees provided hosts with food and non-food items they received from relief distributions: vegetable oil, soy beans, flour, plastic tarps, soap, and even farming hoes. According to a WFP representative, refugees sold about 75 percent of the food distributed to them. One local woman bragged that she got "a nice cooking pot with a lid for just two ears of maize!" Clothes, shoes, music tapes, and other consumer goods were also widely available to local residents during the refugee presence. Thus, villagers benefited from increased trade both by acquiring a large and nearby market for their crops and through the increased availability of basic household items.

There were concerns, however, about this trade between refugees and hosts. Health officials claimed that some food which was distributed to refugees and then sold to Tanzanians had already passed its expiration date. They argued that this endangered local communities, and that the government should therefore be allowed to inspect food before distribution. The USA-donated vegetable oil also caused concern, in part because it did not have composition labels. Some villagers associated this oil with diseases such as high blood pressure, impotency, and slow growth in children.

In addition to business and trade, the coming of the refugee relief operation increased employment opportunities for hosts. NGOs hired Tanzanians in all levels of their organizations from guards, drivers, and maids to field staff, administrators, and accountants. National staff received favorable salary packages which enabled them to build new houses and purchase bicycles, radios, clothes, and even cars. Salaries in the relief operation were two to three times the level of salaries for similar positions elsewhere in Tanzania (Waters 1996). The UNHCR

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<sup>9</sup> During this time period, country-wide increases in business and trading activity were due in large part to government policies of economic liberalization. Still, the influx of refugees and aid agencies into western Tanzania further increased both demand and available resources.

<sup>10</sup> Villagers planted many *ndizi kali* (brewing bananas) after the refugee influx. Refugees earned a reputation for heavy drinking which local farmers sought to exploit. One man complained about a shortage in his village of local beer, which was all being sold in the camps.

sub-office in Ngara alone had a monthly payroll of Tsh 26 million (about \$40,000) at the peak of its operation (FAO 1995).

The inflated salaries offered by relief organizations also had negative consequences, though. Many employees from hospitals, schools, and government departments left their positions in search of greener pastures. In Ngara, for example, more than 50 percent of health center staff and 35 percent of dispensary workers left their government posts to work with relief agencies. Church missions lost staff members to NGOs and were forced to raise salaries in order to retain others. It was often difficult for organizations to attract replacements for these workers because of the high cost of living and remoteness of refugee-affected districts. On the positive side, however, NGOs hired secondary school finishers and newly-trained teachers whom the government was not able to employ because of recent hiring freezes enforced under donor-funded austerity programs.

Although employment opportunities increased with the coming of the refugees, there was fierce competition for all positions and many of the more senior positions went to better-educated Tanzanians from other regions. This caused resentment in local communities. In Kigoma, villagers complained vehemently that NGOs only hired people from Kagera. Many staff were in fact transferred to the Kigoma operation after the departure of Rwandan refugees from Kagera region. NGO representatives argued that they sought the most qualified individuals, and that most educated people from Kigoma no longer lived in the region. Nevertheless, even at lower-level positions, hundreds of local people were hired and were able to bring a degree of development to their communities.

The economic boom associated with the refugee presence was accompanied by an increase in the cost of living. Housing became particularly expensive, even when compared to Dar es Salaam. Local landlords benefited substantially from this situation, while renters struggled to pay. The prices of basic items such as meat, salt, soap, and kerosene rose by 100 to 400 percent. Price increases were a particular hardship for bank employees, teachers, and civil servants whose salaries did not include cost-of-living allowances. But price hikes were not solely attributable to the refugee presence. The 1997 drought reduced farm yields in many areas of the country, causing traders to seek agricultural produce in areas such as Kigoma and thereby driving up prices. In 1998, prices of non-farm products rose sharply because of transportation difficulties resulting from heavy El Niño rains.

These findings with respect to the economic impact of the refugee presence in western Tanzania are largely consistent with data from other refugee contexts (Kok 1989; Callamard 1994; Kuhlman 1994). In Malawi, a trading system flourished between Mozambican refugees and local villagers. It was driven by factors such as lack of variety in the refugee food basket, the ability of refugees to gain access to additional rations, and local demand for items distributed to the refugees (Callamard 1994). In southern Sudan, researchers were surprised to find that Ugandan refugees made a positive contribution to the local economy (Harrell-Bond 1986), largely because of their labor and the injection of capital through aid and business. The presence of refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea in Sudan also had positive effects on several economic sectors (Kuhlman 1994). In general,

...[economic] interactions between refugees and hosts [underline] the ability of both communities to found a trading system and generate incomes within an economic space limited, on one side by refugee status, refugee policy and refugee assistance, on the other by the structural economic conditions of the area of settlement. (Callamard 1994: 59)

In western Tanzania, refugees and hosts devised a range of strategies and interactions which led to the emergence of a sophisticated and dynamic economic network.

### ***Infrastructure and development resources***

The refugee situation in western Tanzania also affected infrastructure and development resources. During the influx, border area schools were damaged when refugees slept in classrooms, burned desks as firewood, and filled latrines. Local health facilities were over-

stretched. Even after the establishment of hospitals in the camps, refugees continued to make use of district and regional facilities as referral hospitals. Refugees occupied more beds than Tanzanians at several hospitals.<sup>11</sup> The criminal justice system was overburdened; refugees at times represented as many as 75 percent of jail inmates. Frequent travel of heavy relief trucks on roads built for lighter trucks combined with heavy rains to make transport exceedingly difficult. Financial resources in the area were also strained; banks were not prepared for the demand on their services, and frequently ran out of money.

In addition to overburdening the existing infrastructure, the refugee presence led to the diversion of development resources to the relief operation. In 1994, for example, contractor's equipment for a major highway in Ngara district was moved instead toward camp construction (Green 1994) before eventually returning to its original purpose.

The diversion of resources also included local human resource capacities. Throughout the area, people's time and resources were directed toward dealing with the refugee situation. The Ngara District Commissioner estimated that 75 percent of his office's time was used for 'refugee business,' i.e. receiving high-level international delegations, attending meetings, etc. In border areas, village and ward-level officials worked 24-hour days during the initial influx in their attempts to meet basic food, medical, and housing needs for the refugees. The work force dropped in many villages as people conducted business and worked in the camps. In villages closest to the camps, a number of children stopped going to school and instead conducted petty businesses.<sup>12</sup> In a sense, the refugee presence put a hold on long-term development activities in host communities.

With respect to human resource development, the refugee presence was also associated with an influx of diseases. Some diseases, such as measles, had been eradicated from the area years before. Others, including a high-fever malaria and an intense dysentery, were resistant to conventional drugs. Skin diseases like scabies and worms were widespread and affected a large number of local children. As expected, sexually transmitted diseases also became a problem, including an increase in the prevalence of HIV/AIDS.<sup>13</sup> Combined with this, there was a shortage of drugs and medicine. Many traditional medicines used by local healers were no longer available because trees were cut down and their roots had been used. This dual trend—a burden on local health facilities and an increase in contagious diseases—is common in refugee-hosting areas (Kibreab 1985).

In response to these various negative consequences of the refugee situation for local infrastructure and development resources, international and local NGOs initiated development projects for host communities in water, health, education, natural resources, and infrastructure. Early in the relief operation, the government and donors made a deliberate decision that Tanzanian hosts would not be compensated individually for damage related to the refugee presence. Instead, they decided to pursue a social compensation approach which would benefit host communities as a whole through rehabilitation of infrastructure and improvement of social services. The intent was to compensate Tanzanians collectively for the burden of hosting refugees, and to mitigate the impact:

There is a perception among the local population that the refugees are better cared for and enjoying a higher standard of living than the indigenous Tanzanians in the area. There is therefore a likelihood of social friction between the two populations. To

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<sup>11</sup> UNHCR reimbursed the hospitals for costs incurred by refugees and provided them with financial and equipment assistance.

<sup>12</sup> Several village councils eventually intervened to persuade children and their parents that children should be in school. At one local school just opposite a refugee market, a fence was constructed around the perimeter in an effort to keep children from slipping away.

<sup>13</sup> Previously, Ngara district had the lowest HIV/AIDS prevalence in the region at 0.4%, compared to 12% in Bukoba and 10% in Muleba (FAO 1995). Evidence suggests that this number rose drastically. According to one official, recently, two in five blood donors at the hospital were found to be HIV positive.

forestall this and the drop in earnings which would otherwise occur when the refugees eventually leave, it is essential that the indigenous population is 'compensated' and their lot improved so that they can continue to accept the presence of refugees in their neighbourhood. (FAO 1995: x).

Donors responded strongly to the government request for support. Throughout western Tanzania, more than 50 primary schools and 20 dispensaries were rehabilitated, 4 district hospitals expanded, 120 water systems were improved or installed, a community center was constructed, and several teacher resource centers were built. There were plans to rehabilitate more schools and dispensaries and to upgrade several town water and electrical systems. Long-neglected infrastructure was upgraded with minimal required contribution from host communities. Implementing NGOs usually provided materials which were not available locally, and hired refugee laborers to complete construction. Schools were provided with teaching/learning materials, health workers were trained, and dispensaries were given equipment and drugs. Villagers praised these various rehabilitation efforts because they believed that the projects would have a lasting impact in their communities.

In addition to village-based projects, donors also invested large sums to upgrade transportation infrastructure throughout the area. In Kagera region, more than \$15 million went toward the rehabilitation of main and feeder roads, airstrips, and telecommunications infrastructure. Donors also pledged funds to rehabilitate the main Kibondo-Kasulu-Kigoma road and several feeder roads in Kigoma region starting in late 1998. Road rehabilitation made internal transportation cheaper and easier for host communities, as vehicle traffic increased and private businesspeople started daladala bus services.

Finally, host communities close to the refugee camps benefited by gaining access to refugee health facilities. Prior to the refugee influx, the government had introduced a cost-sharing program requiring Tanzanians to pay a portion of their health care costs, which until then had been free. Transportation to hospitals was difficult to find and sick people would sometimes die en route. At refugee health facilities, though, Tanzanians were provided services free of charge. In addition, when a medical problem was too severe to be handled at the camp-based hospitals, refugees and Tanzanians alike were provided with free transportation to district hospitals. Many hosts, particularly women, viewed free health care in the camps as a significant benefit of the refugee presence.

### ***Social dynamics***

The presence of large refugee populations inevitably altered social dynamics in host communities. Villagers in this perimeter area of the country suddenly had cities in their midst; those cities offered many of the same opportunities-both positive and negative-associated with cities around the world. On one side, districts in western Tanzania were put on the map. Ngara in particular became known internationally and was visited by millions via international media, including CNN and BBC. Both Kagera and Kigoma regions received high-level international delegations, and became more significant within the dynamics of domestic politics. Regions that were once considered remote came to be regarded as common places to visit and work. The refugee influx opened eyes as well as doors, allowing host communities and visitors to learn from one another.

Tanzanian hosts established extensive social relations with refugees, particularly in areas close to the camps. The two groups socialized together, visited one another, and attended social functions such as weddings and funerals of the other. Rwandan and Burundian refugees, with their impressive dance and drum routines, were often asked to entertain at local ceremonies. Refugee and local teams frequently competed in soccer and other sports. Some Tanzanians even took refugees as wives.

Social relations between refugees and hosts also had some negative consequences. Certain locals tended to disappear into the "cities" or "Kigali", as the refugee camps were known, and

did not return to their home villages for hours and even days.<sup>14</sup> The camps were also associated with social problems such as drunkenness, prostitution, sexual promiscuity, and mischief. Elderly people perceived a breakdown of the traditional social structure and a change in the attitudes of youth toward their elders and their roots during the time of the refugees. Hosts did not blame the refugees for these changing social dynamics, but rather saw them as an inevitable result of the drastic population increase in the area.

Western Tanzania also experienced high levels of crime and insecurity after the refugees came. Theft was the most common threat to villagers. Everything from household items to bicycles was taken, but the primary targets were agricultural crops and livestock. At times, local hosts were robbed violently by machete-wielding thieves who threatened to burn down houses or cut people who resisted their demands. Refugee and Tanzanian thieves cooperated with one another to rob local communities. Locals were generally used as inspectors to scope out what was available and to alert refugees about where to go. Frequent theft, and the fear that Tanzanian neighbors were involved, combined to create a widespread sense of insecurity in host communities.

Armed banditry was also a problem. Aid agencies and businesspeople hired gangs of guards to protect their assets. Several people were killed and many more robbed in ambushes on open stretches of road. Again, Tanzanians cooperated in crime with refugees.<sup>15</sup> The weapons used in these activities were generally acquired in refugee camps, despite concerted government efforts to rid the camps of weapons. Crime rates rose sharply in Kagera and Kigoma regions after the refugee influx, especially for crimes such as murder, armed robbery, and illegal possession of firearms (Lwehabura 1995).

Border villages experienced additional insecurity because of their proximity to the conflicts in neighboring Burundi and Rwanda. In late 1994, two villagers in Ngara district were killed while farming along the Kagera river border with Rwanda. The shots were fired from the Rwandan side of the river. Villagers farming near the Burundi border witnessed the death of several sheep across the river after one of the animals stepped on a land mine. People became scared to farm fertile land near the river, and some abandoned their cultivation efforts altogether. A limited number of hosts even moved to other areas of the country to escape theft and insecurity, themselves in a sense becoming refugees.

Overall, the sudden presence of refugees and relief resources changed opportunities for host communities in both positive and negative ways. However, these changes were not uniform throughout refugee-hosting areas. They varied between specific host communities, among social groups, and over time (Kok 1989). The refugee presence in western Tanzania created the opportunity for some but not all local hosts to benefit; others actually became worse off. Variations in refugee impact between geographic areas and over time will be examined elsewhere. The remainder of this paper explores variations between Tanzanian hosts. Their different individual experiences depended on a variety of factors, including gender, age, class, and strategies devised by the hosts themselves.

### **Varying host experiences during the refugee presence**

Women were generally less able than men to gain access to beneficial opportunities created by the refugee presence in western Tanzania. Women tended to suffer more from environmental degradation associated with the refugee presence because they were traditionally responsible for collecting firewood and water. As they walked farther and used more time to collect these resources, they had less time and energy to put toward other aspects of their own development. In some families, men started to help their wives gather firewood on their bicycles

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<sup>14</sup> One woman complained, "You would tell your husband to run down to the camps with a bucket of beans to sell, and to return with soap. He wouldn't return until the next day!"

<sup>15</sup> During one armed ambush, bandits got on the bus and went directly to a local businesswoman whom they knew to be carrying Tsh 8 million (\$13,350). They were apparently informed by an employee at the bank where she had withdrawn the money the previous day.

because of the distance. In general, though, women shouldered most of the burden of the environmental impact. A time use survey conducted with women in Karagwe district found that their time spent daily to collect firewood and water increased by 23 percent and 18 percent respectively after the refugee influx.

Many women also saw their opportunities in the economic arena shrink. They often lost control over household resources as their husbands assumed additional responsibilities. Crops whose sales were previously controlled by women became the preserve of men as soon as prices went up and larger sums of money were involved. This situation was explained by one woman:

Bananas, beans, and maize in our culture belong to women. Men own livestock, sorghum, and certain types of bananas used to make local beer. But due to the price of bananas [during the refugee presence], men took control over everything in the house and women could not resist. If you resisted, your husband would slap you, then you would be divorced, and the refugee woman would take your place.

Thus, household economic decisions were increasingly determined by men. This pattern conformed to a general tendency for men to take control of petty trade activities whenever these become profit-making (Daley 1991; Callamard 1994). Even when women continued to control the sales themselves, profits were frequently confiscated by their husbands.

The threat mentioned above that husbands would take refugee wives was common in host communities. Women felt they had no choice but to humbly obey their husbands, lest they be replaced by refugees. Tanzanian men did not have to pay a bride price to marry refugee women, which led to a perception that refugee wives were cheap and easily available. In addition, as mentioned before, men often disappeared into the camps for days at a time. Women did not dare ask their husbands where they had been upon their return, although they worried about the potential health and economic implications of their whereabouts. In many cases, therefore, relations within the home grew worse during the refugee presence.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suggest that all host women were negatively affected by the refugee situation. Many women were able to take advantage of changing opportunities for their own benefit. Some started small-scale businesses which they kept separate from household economics. They opened restaurants and sold handicrafts such as woven mats, especially in villages close to the camps. Many women also took advantage of the widespread availability of refugee farm laborers. In an area where women do most of the day-to-day agricultural work, the employment of refugees allowed women to pursue other endeavors. One woman boasted, "We became the bosses." The time use survey in Karagwe found that the hours women spent farming per day dropped by more than 25 percent during the refugee presence, while time spent resting, socializing, weaving mats, and doing similar activities increased by more than 25 percent. Thus, while the refugee presence may have reduced the power and control of some women, it afforded others the opportunity to accumulate cash and thereby gain a degree of economic independence. As has been found in similar contexts (Callamard 1994), this change was quite important to local women who previously enjoyed few income-generating opportunities.

### ***Vulnerable individuals: older persons and people with disabilities***

Changing dynamics associated with the refugee presence created different opportunities for local hosts depending on their age and physical health. Generally speaking, Tanzanian youth were most able to take advantage of the business and job opportunities created by the influx of refugees and international organizations. Youth had freedom and strength compared to older hosts. In addition, the increase in employment opportunities came at a time when many local youth were unemployed, even those with secondary school education. When the NGOs came, the problem of youth unemployment was alleviated for a time and many young adults were able to build houses and start families as a result.

In contrast, elderly hosts and those with disabilities were not able to gain as much from the opportunities that were so prevalent for youth. Many did not have the strength, mobility, and energy necessary to get involved in business or to be hired by NGOs. In addition, elderly and disabled Tanzanians were directly affected by the migration of village youth to the camps. Prior

to the refugees, these people depended heavily on younger members of their own families to collect firewood and water, farm, and do household chores. When youth got jobs and started businesses in the camps, many of the more vulnerable hosts were left home alone with no assistance.

As a result, many elderly persons and people with disabilities sought assistance, as it were, from refugee workers. They exchanged bananas from their household plots for firewood and water from the refugees, and sold crops to get some cash. The problem, of course, was that this sort of assistance was no longer provided to vulnerable Tanzanians by their extended family networks. As one host said, "Refugees helped [the elderly], but nothing was provided free of charge." This situation contributed to a view widely held by older villagers that the refugee presence led to a breakdown in social structures, and that local youth no longer treated their elders with an appropriate level of respect.<sup>16</sup> Similar patterns have been found in other areas where agricultural decline and urbanization spawn high mobility amongst youth and a concentration of elderly people in rural communities.

### ***Poor farmers and casual laborers***

Host experiences with the refugee presence also varied depending on socioeconomic class. Wealthy hosts especially were able to take advantage of local economic opportunities and expand upon their wealth during that period. They used start-up capital to build profitable shops and restaurants, and to invest in other businesses, such as minibuses and transport lorries. Some even rented out property (houses, cars) to the relief operation, thereby ensuring a monthly influx of hard currency throughout the refugee presence.

Farmers producing a surplus of food crops were also poised to benefit from the refugee situation. They sold their surplus crops for prices that had never before been seen in the area. They made use of cheap refugee labor to expand their farms, thus increasing production and selling even more surplus. Although some were frustrated by the drop in bean and maize prices when refugees sold their rations, they generally more than made up for the lost sales of these crops through increased sales of bananas and cassava, whose prices skyrocketed. Surplus farmers were also able to use refugee labor and their sales of extra food to construct durable houses of cement or bricks with corrugated iron roofs. In effect, most Tanzanian hosts who had extra money or food were able to devise strategies to benefit from the refugee presence and the relief operation.

Poor Tanzanians were not able to benefit in the same ways as wealthy hosts and some in fact became worse off during the refugee presence. The poor were particularly affected by high rates of inflation, which forced them to pay much higher prices for basic supplies such as salt, sugar, and kerosene. Subsistence farmers were less able to take advantage of refugee labor because they did not have sufficient disposable funds or crops to pay the refugees. Nevertheless, in some areas, even poor subsistence farmers were able to hire refugee workers by paying with minimal amounts of household food stocks. In addition, poor hosts living close to the camps took advantage of refugee health and water facilities. Thus, while wealthy hosts and surplus farmers clearly benefited more from the refugee presence, some poor Tanzanians also devised strategies to make the most of the situation.

Sub-subsistence farmers who depended on day labor to meet basic household livelihood needs were particularly negatively affected by the refugee presence. Traditionally, in western Tanzania, poor farmers who cannot produce sufficient food for their families seek work opportunities on the farms of wealthier neighbors. The frequency of this pattern is dependent on weather and other factors; in years of drought or poor harvests, more farmers are forced to sell their labor in order to satisfy household needs. In times of material deprivation, therefore,

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<sup>16</sup> One elderly man complained, "Before, we could send our children to do anything. That was our culture for a long time. But now you can't ask a child to do anything. S/he'll say, 'Give me 200 shillings!'" Another said, "Before, we had obedient children who heeded our advice and spent the nights at home. That was different after the refugees came because they got jobs and learned bad habits. Youths don't even have time to greet their elders now."

casual labor is the primary coping mechanism available to disadvantaged households. It is important to note that many of the poorest of these sub-subsistence households are headed by more vulnerable members of society - single mothers, orphans, elderly people, and people with disabilities.

In the refugee context, sub-subsistence farmers were not able to compete with refugees in the labor market. After the refugee influx, the wage paid to a casual laborer dropped by 50 percent in many areas. This depression of wage rates was caused by two factors. First, the sudden presence of a huge refugee population greatly increased the supply of available laborers. Second, refugees were able to accept lower wages because they were already receiving food rations and other non-food assistance (Kibreab 1985). In this sense, the international relief effort served to subsidize local farmers who hired refugee laborers (Kok 1989; Kuhlman 1994). In addition, many farmers perceived the refugees as harder workers than locals. Thus, poorer hosts were forced to accept lower wages or look for work in other areas. As day labor wages fell and prices of food and consumer goods rose, the lives of these sub-subsistence households became particularly difficult (FAO 1995).

These findings largely confirm hypotheses offered by Chambers (1986) about the impact of refugees and relief operations. People in all socioeconomic classes benefited from refugee services which were shared with hosts, as well as new development projects in local communities. Most suffered in similar ways from refugee exploitation of common property resources and increased pressure on existing services. High food prices were beneficial to surplus farmers, but detrimental to sub-subsistence farmers who relied on food purchase to satisfy household needs. Surplus and some subsistence producers made use of cheap refugee labor, while sub-subsistence farmers could no longer depend on selling their labor during times of scarcity. Finally, with respect to overall economic development, the refugee presence opened up opportunities on which some hosts - particularly wealthier ones - were able to capitalize more than others. Still, poor hosts lose less in periods of economic growth than they lose in periods of decline (Chambers 1986).

### ***Employees on fixed incomes***

Although many Tanzanians benefited from employment opportunities in the refugee relief operation, employees on fixed incomes were negatively affected by increases in the cost of living during the period. The salaries of civil servants, bank employees, and parastatal staff did not cover nearly as many expenses as they had before the refugees came. Meanwhile, these employees witnessed the immense buying power of their colleagues working for international organizations. The result was a de-motivation of local staff. Although government salaries were raised on a national basis during the time of the refugees, no adjustment was made for the high cost of living in refugee-hosting districts.

Discrepancies between the salaries of staff working in the relief operation and those of other employees eventually caused problems within one local NGO. The organization's operations were split into a development program, funded by small-scale donations and income generating activities, and a refugee program, funded by UNHCR. Employees working for the development program were paid significantly less than those doing identical jobs on the refugee side. Tensions between the two groups were high, and two staff members quit because of the salary crisis. Eventually, most employees on short-term UNHCR salaries agreed to contribute to a general fund to supplement the salaries of long-term development staff. Other groups in the area also found it difficult to compete with the salary scales of UNHCR-funded NGOs. Several NGOs were forced to adjust their salary scales upwards by as much as 40 percent in order to attract qualified employees.

### ***Creative strategies***

In addition to gender, age, and socioeconomic factors shaping the experiences of hosts, some people devised particularly innovative strategies to capitalize on the opportunities created by the refugee presence. The story of one older man provides a useful example. When "Mzee X" moved to Karagwe in 1977, he noticed that there were not many trees in the area, so he planted several tree farms. Years later, in 1989, he acquired rights of occupancy to his land

from the government. His 10 hectares of land were appraised at \$83,000, and his annual lease payments to the government were just \$1.70. Refugees arrived in 1994, although relief agencies did not start building semi-permanent structures in the camps until early 1995. At that time, Mzee X got a contract with UNHCR to provide trees for use as building poles. The contract was worth \$12,500 - a bit more than 83¢ per tree. Mzee X decided not to exhaust his own woodlots in meeting the requirements of the contract, and instead bought some trees from other farmers at about 30¢ per tree.

In April 1995, Mzee X used his land as collateral to secure a two year loan from the bank for \$13,300. He combined that with his profits from the UNHCR contract to buy a brand new lorry, which he used to transport cooking bananas from Karagwe district to the refugee market in Ngara. He paid a total of \$300 to fill his truck with bananas and for round-trip fuel costs. Upon arrival in Ngara, the bananas were sold for more than \$700 to a refugee middle-man, who then sold individual bunches on the market. His truck made the trip every two to three days, earning him between \$1,200 and \$1,600 per week. In April 1997, Mzee X paid off the remainder of his bank loan, and used some of his new-found wealth to marry several new and younger wives.

Other Tanzanian hosts devised similarly creative strategies through which they gained access to incoming resources, particularly from the relief operation. It cannot be assumed, however, that all local hosts had the same "capacity or opportunity to manipulate the advantages of the 'aid system'" (Harrell-Bond 1986: 124). It was not the case that some were simply more creative than others, and thus were better able to exploit the situation for maximum benefit. As the example demonstrates, hosts who made use of creative techniques to gain access to incoming resources already had access to other resources within the local context - land, education, property, etc. Tanzanian hosts who did not already have these and other resources did not have the same opportunities to benefit.

## **Conclusion**

It is not possible to say whether host communities in western Tanzania as a whole gained or lost as a result of the influx of refugees and relief resources. The situation created both positive and negative opportunities for local hosts. Many Tanzanians took advantage of these opportunities and benefited substantially from the presence of refugees and international relief organizations. Other Tanzanians were not able to benefit as much, and some even lost access to resources and power which they previously enjoyed. In general, hosts developed ways to cope with the negative impact of the refugees while attempting to take full advantage of the positive opportunities created by their presence.

The broad pattern which emerged was that hosts who already had access to resources or power were better poised to exploit the refugee situation and capitalize further. Hosts who were disadvantaged in the local socioeconomic structure struggled to maintain access to even the most basic resources and thus became further marginalized. This pattern held true at a broader level as well; districts which were already generating development opportunities tended to benefit more than poorer areas. In this sense, it was a typical example of the type of development which reinforces divisions embedded in the local setting. Still, in some cases, these realities were transformed by emerging possibilities and new circumstances. Different strategies and structures led to a wide range of experiences within host communities. These changing socioeconomic opportunities were likely to have long-term implications for the ongoing process of development in western Tanzania.

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